

moral judgment of these parents of Dreamers. As to legal judgment, the case is clear. But as to a moral judgment, no, I just will not do it.

What I have done 101 or 102 times is to come to this floor and just tell a story—a story about a Dreamer—so that people know who they are. Today I would like to tell you the story of this young lady whose name is Karen Reyes. Karen Reyes is the 104th Dreamer whom I have introduced on the floor of the Senate, brought to the United States from Mexico. She grew up in San Antonio. She had a childhood like other American kids—Girl Scouts, summer camps, church groups, volleyball. Karen didn't even know she was undocumented until she was in junior high school.

She was a good student. She graduated with honors from high school. She was a member of the marching band. Here is what she said about growing up in America:

I might be an undocumented American, but I am an American. I came to this country when I was 2 years old. The only recollection that I have of Mexico is when I visited as a young child. I have not gone back in 20 years. I grew up here. I formed a life here. I made friends here. I received my education here.

After high school, Karen went to San Antonio College and then transferred to the University of Texas San Antonio. She made the President's Honors List and the Dean's List.

She found time to volunteer at the University Health System and at the San Antonio Youth Literacy project. She tutored second grade students in reading, and she worked with communities and schools where she mentored and tutored elementary students.

In 2012, Karen graduated with a bachelor of arts in interdisciplinary studies. She went on to the Deaf Education and Hearing Science Program at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

In 2014, Karen graduated with a master's degree in deaf education and hearing science.

Today, she is working as a special education teacher in Austin, TX. Here is a picture of her with the kids. She teaches 3- and 4-year-old kids who are deaf or hard of hearing. She teaches kids with disabilities. Here is what she said about DACA, the program that was abolished by President Trump, which allows her to live in the United States and to work as a teacher:

DACA made me visible. DACA made it possible for me to teach children who are deaf and hard of hearing. I am helping these students and families on their journey to being able to communicate and achieve their dreams. Before I didn't think I had a voice, but now I do. . . . I get to change lives every single day.

Twenty thousand other DACA students and recipients like Karen are teachers in our schools. Because DACA was repealed, Texas stands to lose 2,000 teachers. I ask the State of Texas: Are you ready to lose Karen? Are you ready to lose 2,000 more just like her because

the Senate and the House of Representatives refused to act, refused to legislate, refused to provide protection to her?

As for Karen, her DACA expires in August of next year. This will be her last school year. If Congress doesn't step up and meet its responsibility and pass the Dream Act, her time teaching these deaf and hard of hearing children will come to an end.

In a few days we are going to go home and celebrate Christmas with our families. It is a big, important time of year. My wife and I are looking forward to it. We get to see all of the grandkids in one place. It is going to be pure bedlam, but we are going to love every second of it. Christmas means that much to our families. Being together means so much to our families.

Think for a moment about those who are protected with DACA. This may be their last Christmas in the United States. They don't know where they will be next Christmas because the President abolished the protection program and because Congress refuses to act. They don't know where they will be and they don't know whether they will be with family or not. That is the reality.

What a reflection on our Nation that we have reached this point to punish someone like Karen, a giving, caring, educated professional person who is spending time helping little boys and girls who desperately need her help.

Some in this Chamber—and I have seen them face to face—are ready to tell her to leave: We don't need you anymore, Karen. Go back to wherever you came from. Just get out of here. That is their attitude. It is not mine nor the majority of Americans.

Over three out of four Americans believe Karen deserves a chance. Over three out of four Americans believe she should be allowed to stay and earn her way to legal status and citizenship. Incidentally, 60 percent of those who voted for Donald Trump happen to believe that same thing.

But there are voices of division and fear and hatred in this administration. I have seen them. I have heard them. I know what they have to say. The question is, will they prevail? Will they define this President in terms of his treatment of people who are just asking for a chance to be part of America's future? The answer to that question is really not in the President's hands. It is in our hands. We owe it to these young people to do the right thing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I first thank our distinguished leader from Illinois, not only for his eloquence and passion but his unfettered commitment to the young people who were brought here as children, who maybe had never set foot in the country their parents came from and may not know the language. They are here, and a promise was made to them in our country.

I spoke yesterday on the floor about two young people from Michigan. We have 10,000 young people in Michigan—some serving in the military, some in jobs, some in school—who don't know any other country. They love our country, and they just want our country to keep its promise to them. That is what I view it as, keeping our promises. So I thank the Senator.

VETERANS DESERVE BETTER ACT

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, I want to speak about keeping promises to a very important group of Americans as well; that is, our men and women who are serving us as veterans and serving us in the military.

Representing Michigan in the U.S. Senate is a great honor. I know it is for all of us. One of the best parts of the job is being able to work on behalf of Michigan's veterans.

From the Civil War to the World Wars, to the Korean war, to Vietnam, the Cold War, the Gulf war, and our fight against terrorism, Michigan's veterans have given us their all. Our veterans have always been the first in line to defend our democracy. That is why they should never be at the back of any line—for a job, healthcare, housing, or a world-class education.

Unfortunately, there are times when our veterans aren't getting the benefits they deserve, have earned, and have been promised. When that happens, it is our duty to fight for those who fought for us. That is why, in 2014, Congress passed something called the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act, called the Veterans Choice Program.

This legislation aimed to reduce wait times and provide medical services to veterans in their communities after we heard of very serious issues and horrible situations that had occurred for veterans in some parts of our country.

The Veterans Choice Act was created to meet a real need—getting our veterans prompt healthcare in locations that are convenient for them. This program is especially critical for veterans in rural communities throughout Michigan as well as throughout the country—people in rural areas who were previously required to travel long distances, hours and hours, for services.

However, since it was enacted, providers across my State and in many parts of the country have not been getting paid, rural hospitals have pulled out, and this program in Michigan has not been working.

Worst of all, too many Michigan veterans and veterans across the country are struggling to get the appointments and the healthcare they need. That is why, last week, I introduced a bill I am calling the Veterans Deserve Better Act.

This bill will help our veterans in three ways to be able to correct what is occurring right now in Michigan with a private contractor—a private provider

who has not been doing the job. I have talked to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs who understands the problem and agrees this has to be fixed.

My bill will improve the scheduling process for veterans seeking healthcare. They shouldn't have to wait weeks or months to be able to get an appointment with a doctor.

Our military operates under the simple creed, "Leave no person behind," but far too many of our veterans in need of healthcare are languishing in a system that simply isn't accountable to them. Through this private contracting process, that certainly has been the case.

My bill would require the VA, and any outside contractors who are setting up healthcare appointments through the Veterans Choice Program, to provide veterans with more and better information, and if veterans are still struggling to get appointments, they will be told exactly how to file a complaint so it can get fixed.

Second, my legislation will hold third-party contractors accountable. We have excellent service through our VA medical facilities, but this new system—which is supposed to make it better, quicker, and faster—has not been working, and third-party contractors, at least in Michigan, have not been held accountable.

The VA will track all appointments made through outside contractors who must schedule appointments within 5 days. Any appointments not scheduled within 5 days will be sent to the VA for followup.

Within 30 days of this legislation being signed, third-party contractors will be required to submit a list of the veterans who have been waiting for more than 15 days for their appointments. I know of many waiting much longer. We don't leave soldiers on the battlefield. We shouldn't leave veterans to fight alone to get their healthcare needs met.

Third, this legislation ensures that Veterans Choice Program providers receive prompt payment or denial of payment. If payment is denied, the healthcare provider will need to be told why and what information they need to submit in order to get the claim processed.

The VA will also be required to submit a report to Congress on the number of unpaid claims to Veterans Choice Program providers and to take action on those claims within 45 days.

What do I mean by providers? I am talking about our hospitals in northern Michigan, in the Upper Peninsula, in the northwest side of the State, and the northeast side of the State signed up under this program to be able to provide the care for someone who is more than 40 miles away from a VA medical center; then, they find they are not getting paid for their services to the tune of millions and millions of dollars.

Veterans who have served their country and the medical providers who

treat them deserve nothing less than getting this system right. Appointments should be made quickly, payments should be made for service, and there has to be continual accountability. Unfortunately, we know they aren't always getting what they need.

One of those veterans is Jerry, a former National Guardsman who was stationed in Greenville, MI, on the west side of the State. He now lives in Sumner Township in Gratiot County.

Last January, Jerry received a scary diagnosis. He had a lesion on his brain. He needed to see a specialist right away. Veterans Choice was supposed to make an appointment for Jerry to see an endocrinologist, but when he showed up for the appointment, unbelievably, he discovered he was mistakenly sent to a urologist. After that, Veterans Choice sent Jerry to a family practitioner who had no record that he even had an appointment. It was 2 days off of work and travel to visit doctors that Jerry should have never been sent to in the first place.

By this time, Jerry was understandably very upset. He reached out to my office, and I am glad he did, so we could help. We were able to contact Veterans Choice on his behalf and get him the appointment he needed with the right specialist. Now, this is after his spending 5 months—5 months—trying to get to the right doctor. There is no excuse for this.

However, Jerry's issues weren't over. When he saw the same specialist a second time, Jerry learned the doctor had never been reimbursed for his previous visit. As Jerry said, "It shouldn't take five months to see a specialist, especially with something this scary and serious. And I shouldn't have to worry about whether or not Veterans Choice will pay for my care that I have earned."

Yes, Jerry, you have earned and been promised that care.

Jerry is exactly right. Unfortunately, he is not alone in Michigan—I know this from talking to colleagues in other areas—particularly with this same provider. I have heard from many other Michigan veterans who can't get appointments, are getting the wrong appointments, are having to travel long distances to appointments—which, this was supposed to stop veterans from having to drive long distances for appointments—or whose healthcare providers aren't being paid for their services and then deciding they don't want to participate in the Veterans Choice Program.

My colleagues on the Veterans' Affairs Committee are working on comprehensive reforms to the Veterans Choice Program, and we are staring down another funding deadline. It is important this gets done, and we need to do it right away. We need to fix the problems veterans are having to deal with on a daily basis. I am looking forward to working with colleagues to fix this as quickly as possible. Our veterans deserve better. It is time we pass

this legislation and make sure they get it.

I would like to end with the words of a man who knew something about service and sacrifice on behalf of our country.

Before he was President, before he was a member of this very Chamber, John F. Kennedy was a veteran who served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. On August 2, 1943, the PT boat he commanded was struck by a Japanese destroyer in the South Pacific. The entire crew ended up in the water, and two of his men died. Although Lieutenant Kennedy badly injured his back in the collision, he helped his men find safety on an island several miles away, where they were rescued a week later. Kennedy later was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his leadership. He once said: "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

I believe that is our responsibility. It is not enough to praise our veterans on special days, although they have certainly earned every word of praise. Instead, we must work together to uphold each and every promise we have made to them.

Veterans like Jerry and so many others have always been first in line to defend us. It is time to make sure they are not at the back of the line when it comes to getting the healthcare they need.

CHIP AND COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, on a different subject, talking about keeping promises; that is, other people who are counting on us to be able to act in order to get their healthcare.

We have had 81 days since the funding ended for the Children's Health Insurance Program and community health centers. Each State is a little different because of the various combinations of funding and so on, which meant not everyone lost care immediately right after. There are three States this month, others in the first of the year, and so on.

I literally received just a few moments ago a notice from our State saying it is very likely that if we don't act, in January, families in Michigan are going to get a notice that what we call MICHild, which provides healthcare for 100,000 children in Michigan of working families who don't qualify for help through Medicaid or other assistance—they are working and maybe at work they are getting healthcare, but it doesn't cover their children, or maybe they are not getting healthcare, and they want to at least be able to cover their children, that is what MICHild is all about.

It has been 81 days since the deadline of September 30, which stopped the Federal funding from going forward. This affects 9 million children nationwide and 100,000 children in Michigan.